

# THE SHOW GARDENS

The large show gardens created by some of the country's leading garden designers are without doubt what people come to see. The crowds around these show-stopping creations – more theatre than garden – are often several rows deep, and it can be frustrating not to be able to see the gardens clearly. However, the show gardens are always covered comprehensively on television, so if you feel you miss out on the day, watch the coverage when you get home. If you manage to fight your way to the front of the crowd, study plant combinations carefully, taking photographs and jotting down notes. Look out for the gardens built by the contractor and online garden centre Crocus – the Daily Telegraph Garden, designed by Sarah Price, and the Laurent-Perrier Garden designed by Arne Maynard – and if there's a particular plant combination that takes your fancy, you'll be able to order the plants from [www.crocus.co.uk](http://www.crocus.co.uk). Don't get swept away by the theatre of the main show gardens at the expense of the rest of the show. The courtyard gardens, dotted around the show, are equally worth seeing, and often more translatable to your own back garden. A new category this year introduces the Fresh Gardens, which will be more experimental than traditional, to challenge conventional thinking.

## PLANTING TRENDS

As in previous years, most planting schemes in the show gardens are naturalistic and relaxed in feel. Loose herbaceous borders, rich in colour and texture, contrast with more formal geometric structures in places. Roses used in a mixed herbaceous border appear in more than one garden, and umbellifers (ornamental cow parsnips) are used widely to soften other planting. Plants that pop up in more than one garden this year include the gorgeous *Verbascum 'Cherry Helen'* and the naturalistic ornamental grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*. As with last year, multi-streamed accent trees are popular.

## SHOW GARDENS 2012

From a total of 18 large show gardens, we pick five designers who we think are tipped for Gold.



SARAH PRICE  
The Daily  
Telegraph Garden

Sarah Price has been in the news recently for her role as co-designer of the gardens at the Olympic Park. This is her first full-size garden for Chelsea and it has the most naturalistic feel of all the show gardens. Modelled around a sculptural limestone landscape, the garden evokes the beauty of the wild British landscape with a stylised combination of grasses, rushes and meadow flowers that gives a very romantic feel. 'People really seem to be returning to the more simple species of plants and a more natural look,' says Sarah, who is using a mixture of garden perennials and European meadow species such as valerian and orchids. Dotted around the garden is a collection of delicate multi-streamed birches, reinforcing the impression that this is a natural landscape. Key plants: *Betula pendula*, *Deschampsia cespitosa*, *Iris pseudacorus*.

Stewards give advice to visitors, 1937



ARNE MAYNARD  
The Laurent-Perrier  
Bicentenary Garden

Arne Maynard returns to Chelsea after winning Best in Show 12 years ago. His plant-oriented design is elegant and timeless, mixing clipped topiary and pleached copper beech with soft, romantic planting in a palette of clays and mauves. 'I want this to be a real gardener's garden,' he says. 'It's all about using plants for architecture and structure, and I wanted the feel to be modern yet nostalgic.' The pleached-copper-beech avenue is a focal point, chosen because the colour provides contrast to the green plane trees that surround the Chelsea site. 'I want this garden to be accessible,' concludes Arne. 'I want people to get ideas for their own gardens.' Key plants: *Rosa 'Reine des Violettes'*, *Galphimia opposita*, *Verbascum 'Cherry Helen'*.

Edwin Myers's design for Cancer Research UK, Chelsea 2011

